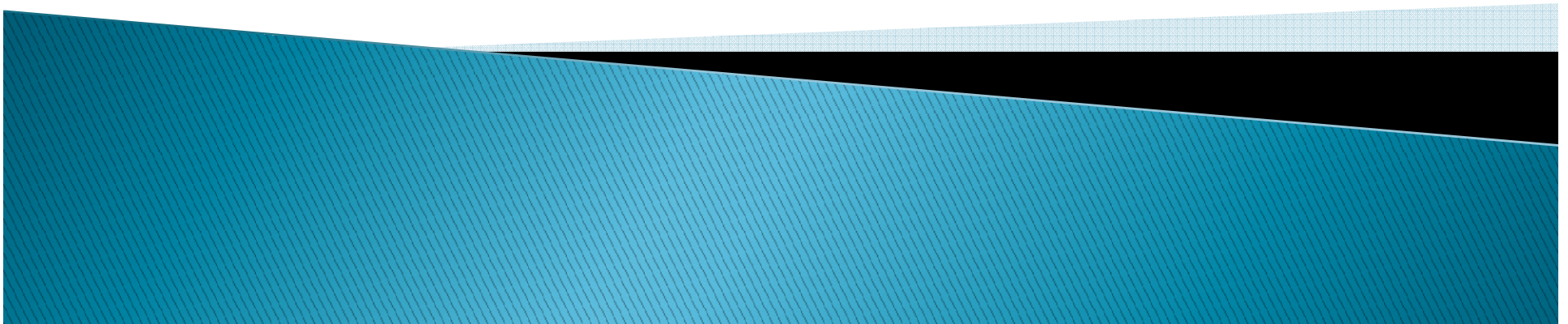


# Nature and Value of Learning Support in Open Distance Learning(ODL)

By:  
Hisham Dzakiria, PhD  
Universiti Utara Malaysia



# Re-Engineering Learning

## Re-Learning..how to learn



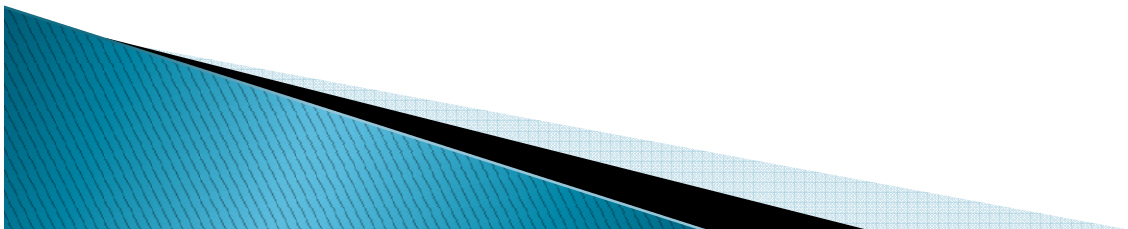
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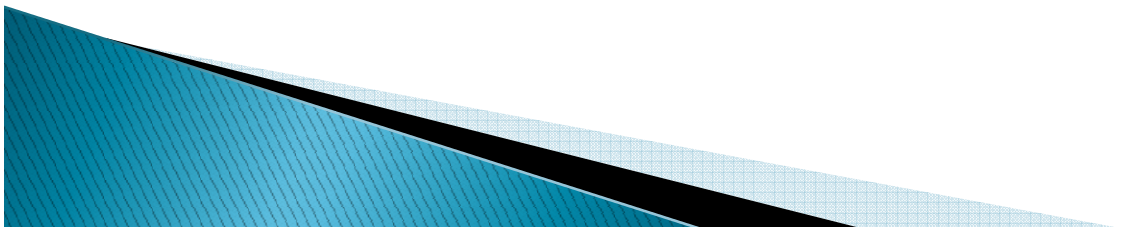
Flickr photo by VCU Libraries

# Scaling Up ODL to the next level

- ▶ There are many lessons that we have learned from 1<sup>st</sup> Generation of Distance Learning to the present generation of ODL. ODL has many issues, barriers and concerns that must be addressed. This presentation addresses the issue of **LEARNING SUPPORT** for better learning interaction in ODL.



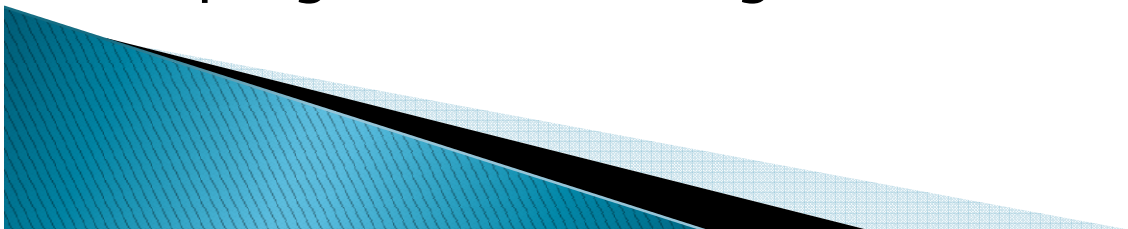
How do you connect with your students?  
How do they connect with you, and each other? How often? What is it for?





# Reality Shows...

- ▶ ODL is picking up fast...
- ▶ ODL is great avenue to learn and earn some kind of certification–certificate, diplomas, degrees, MBAs, PhDs, etc.
- ▶ Single mode ODL institutions are mushrooming
- ▶ Dual mode institutions are common
- ▶ Learning has been made more accessible–  
Democratising education to ALL
- ▶ 80% of higher education institutions have online offerings
- ▶ Reality also shows that Global drop out rate of ODL programmes among students is at 35%



# Physical context is no longer shared



- ▶ Tone of voice
- ▶ Facial expression
- ▶ Body posture
- ▶ Gesture
- ▶ Ambient sound
- ▶ Scent
- ▶ Motion
- ▶ Time
- ▶ A sense of being together



# Instructional contact is “mediated”

ANGEL

Email

Discussion forum

Posted file

Link

Facebook

AIM

Yahoo! Messenger

Google Chat

Twitter

Texting

YouTube

Google Docs

Skype

Telephone

Hard copy

- ▶ Make contact...or don't
- ▶ Make individual contact...or don't
- ▶ Ask questions...or don't
- ▶ See each other...or don't
- ▶ Hear each other...or don't
- ▶ Read each other's words...or don't
- ▶ *Determine tone, formality and sometimes stakes through choice of media*

# When students need help, they may—or may not:

- Recognize it!
- Log in
- Connect with others
- Access materials
- Submit work
- Follow the schedule
- Ask questions
- Work to task
- Realize potential consequences



Flickr photo by autowitch



# Urgency may determine:



- ▶ Timing
- ▶ Medium
- ▶ Synchronicity
- ▶ Size or volume
- ▶ Frequency
- ▶ Recoverability

Reporters filing by telegraph  
Shibe Park, Philadelphia, 1913  
Flickr, Bain News Service, Library of Congress

# Student-Centered Instruction

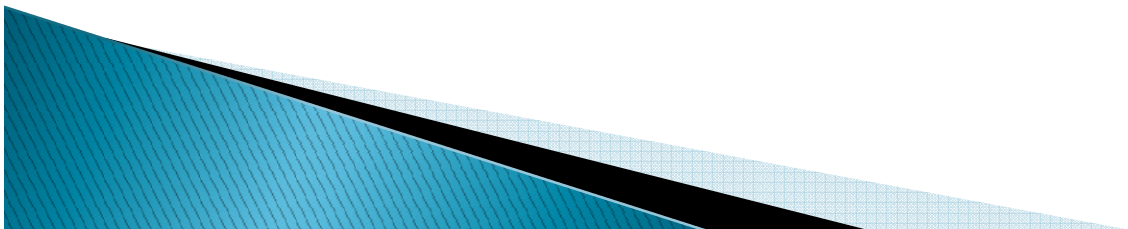
- ▶ Fueling this paradigm shift is the growth of internet connectivity in Malaysia Institutions.
- ▶ This shift provides more student responsibility and choice in their learning.
- ▶ The rapid expansion of distance learning has followed.
- ▶ Malaysia ODL students' successful completion rate was between 65 – 75%
- ▶ Why? We have learned much!

Implementing of a model of support is vital!



# Distance Learning Support

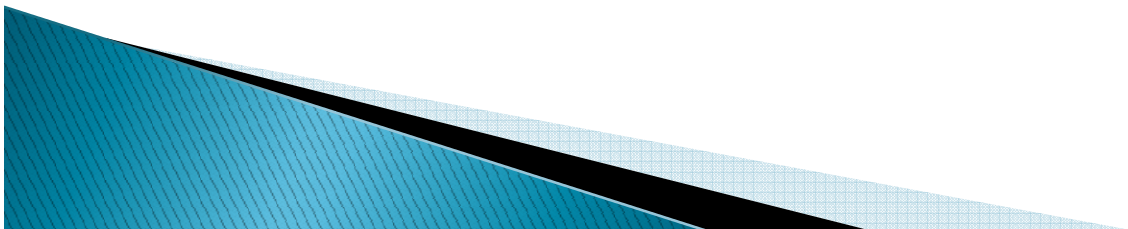
- ▶ Supporting e-learning and virtual schools as one of their major action steps;
- ▶ Palloff and Pratt (2001) explain that just increasing number of distance learners is not sufficient. In order for students to succeed, conditions including building communities of support must be met;
- ▶ The support must include all students from accelerated, mainstreamed, recovery, alternative, and special needs.
- ▶ Similar strategies apply in all cases; one of these is providing support.



# Open Distance Learning Support

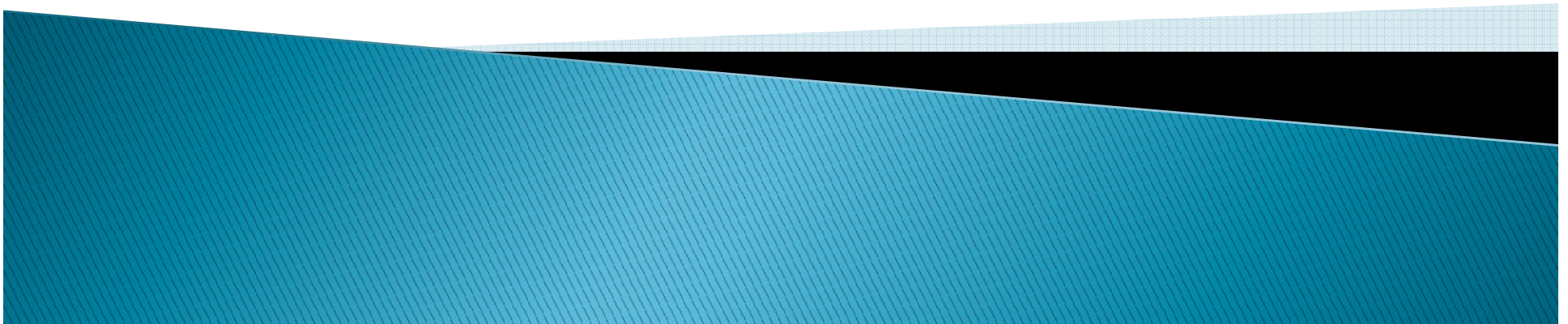
## ▶ But What is ODL Support?

- ▶ What is Our goal on students' success rate?
- ▶ What is OUM's immediate goal?



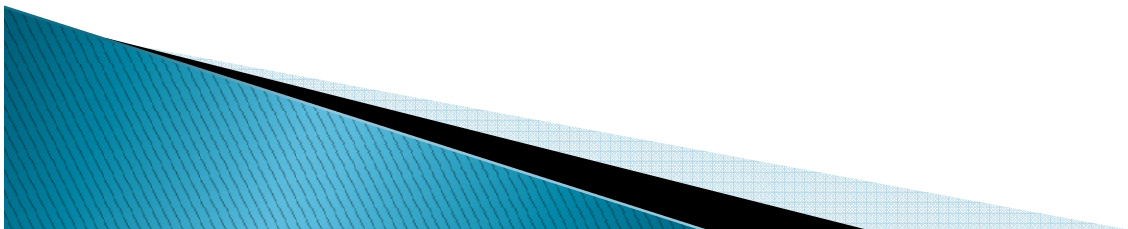


**Let's first examine the  
following discourse /  
narration attained from ODL  
Learners, Tutors,  
Administration :**



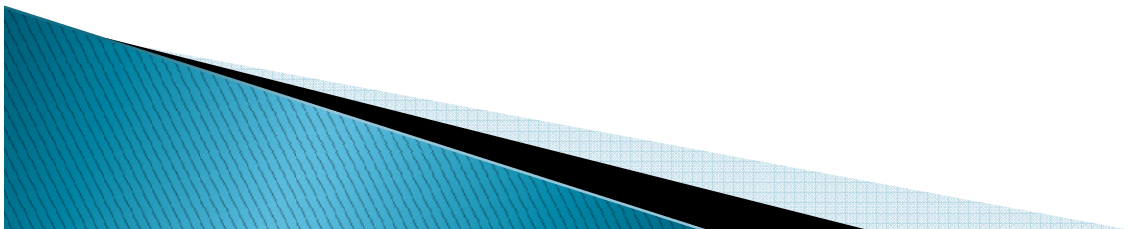
# Sharing Qualitative Experience...

- ▶ “For some time in my distance learning endeavor, I was just like a bird. A beautiful one that did not know where to fly to. I did not know how to study....it is so different than before and I don't see the teachers every so often. I am lost....



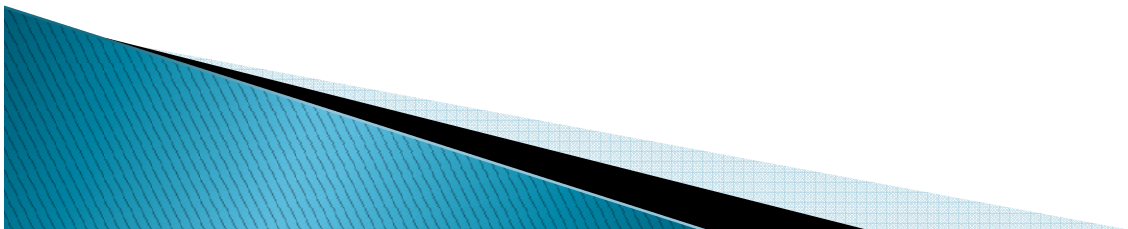
# Sharing Qualitative Experience...

- ▶ “My god...distance learning, the technology use and overall today’s learning environment have changed drastically...it makes my heart pound a lot more making me nervous at times....”
- ▶ “The teacher is always there, but really isn’t...”



# Sharing Qualitative Experience...

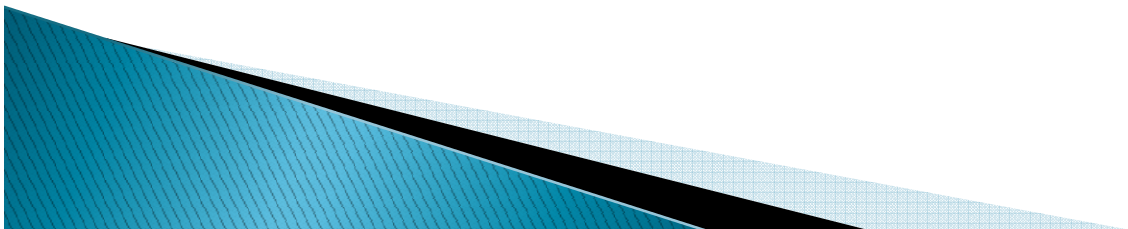
- ▶ I am deeply worried about my learning...there is no teacher available at all times, friends are at a distance...I am always busy with work and busy....when and how can I interact...





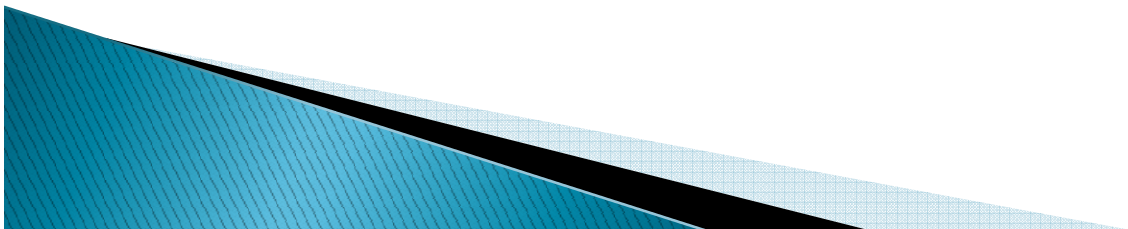
# Direct Quotes – ODL Students' Readiness

- ▶ “Some students expect immediate feedback on everything, so they get upset.”
- ▶ “Our school doesn't have a mandatory orientation for online students on the basics of using the platform or what learning online involves.”
- ▶ “Online learning involves independence and critical thinking....some students aren't prepared for that!”



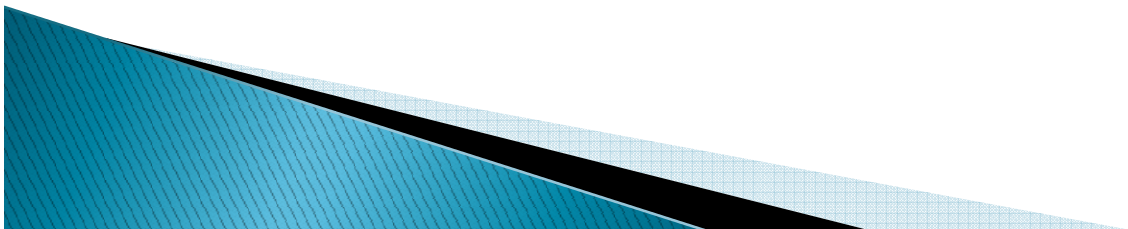
# Direct Quotes–Tutor Readiness

- ▶ “All faculty who teach online should go through some kind of training. When I started teaching online, I had to learn as I went along. There was no one there supporting me.”
- ▶ “....create learning communities where faculty can discuss pedagogic issues.”
- ▶ “Build in financial incentives or more credit toward work load to teach larger online sections or for developing a new online course.”
- ▶ There is no administrative understanding that grading and managing online courses is time consuming and often more difficult than face to face teaching.”



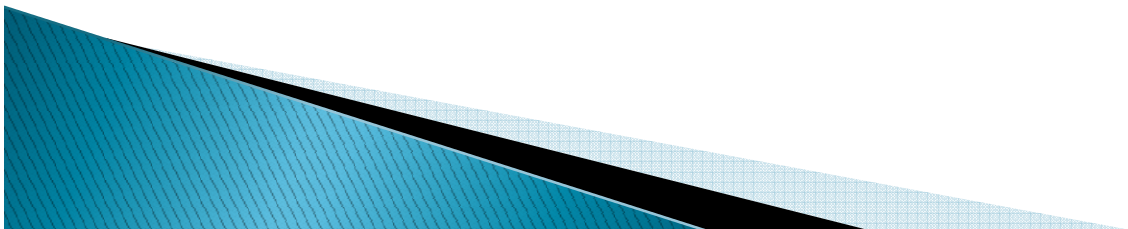
# Direct Quotes – Technological Support

- ▶ “Have someone from the Help Desk available by email or phone 24/7 to be able to assist online students, especially since some students’ schedules require them to work on school at 2am.”
- ▶ “Require students to attend some kind of technology training before going online.”
- ▶ “Hire support staff who can answer questions about the more advanced features of the platform we are using.”



# More Direct Quotes – Academic Integrity

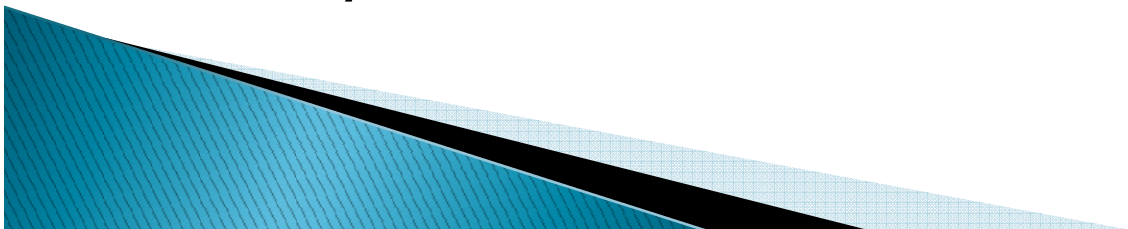
- ▶ “The university should purchase and widely support an anti-plagiarism service.”
- ▶ “Either provide a testing center on campus where learners can have proctored exams, or build relationships with universities or other service providers (i.e. Sylvan ) where exams could be taken.”
- ▶ “Require students to come to campus at the beginning of each semester to show i.d. and confirm that they are the person enrolled in the online course.”
- ▶ “Less emphasis should be placed on testing as assessment. More project based types of assessments could help reduce cheating.”
- ▶ Provide university guidelines for proctoring





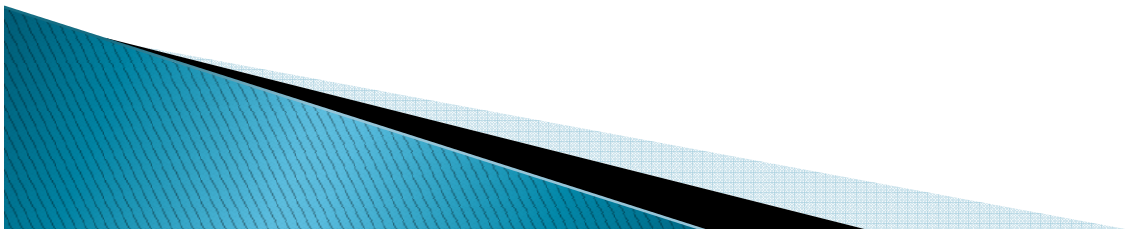
# Hold on your thoughts...

- ▶ What seems to be the issue(s) or barriers that surfaced in the ODL students' discourse?
- ▶ Why do these issues surface?
- ▶ What is the role of learning support and interaction in ODL?
- ▶ How do we re-engineer teaching & learning so that student, tutors of ODL would have better learning-teaching support & interactivity experiences?
- ▶ How do we better support ODL learning?
- ▶ Is technology a silver bullet? – a solution to many issues in ODL?



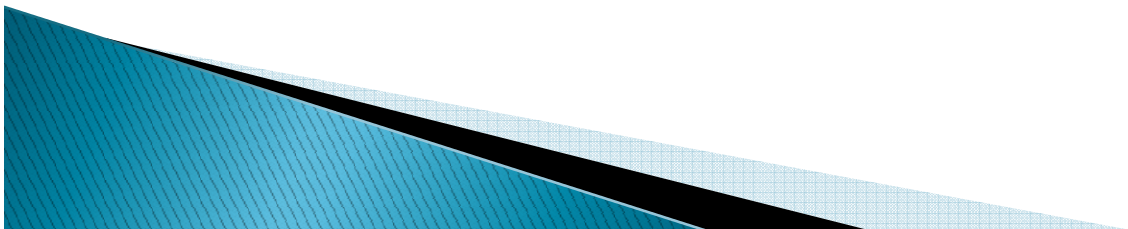
# We ALL know that...

- ▶ Open Distance Learning (ODL) is an excellent method of reaching adult learners.
- ▶ It is truly a medium that helps to democratize education to all.
- ▶ Certainly in Malaysia, with the mushrooming of many single & dual mode institutions that offer ODL makes education accessible to all.
- ▶ For many Malaysians, pursuing ODL is just a matter of choice. With the competing priorities of work, home, and school, adult learners desire a high degree of flexibility.
- ▶ The structure of ODL provides learners with the greatest possible control over the time, place and pace of education;



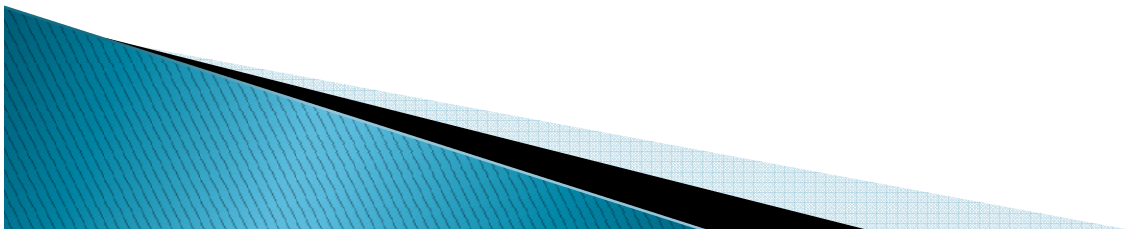
# However...

- ▶ Learning at a distance is not without problems.
- ▶ Loss of student motivation due to the lack of face-to-face contact with teachers and peers, potentially prohibitive startup costs, and lack of faculty support are all barriers to successful ODL.
- ▶ Research showed that 80% of Malaysia learners are 'Visual Learners'



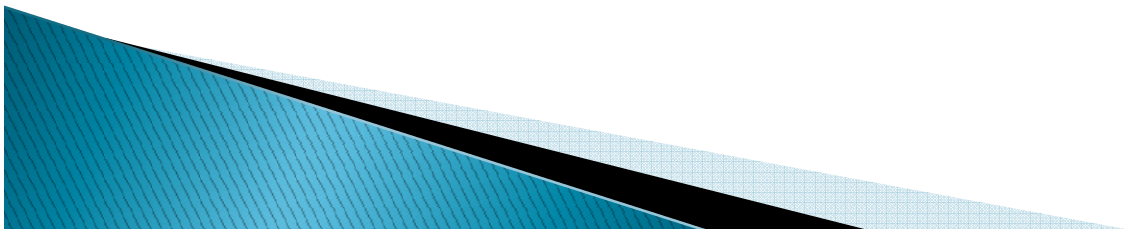
# Interaction as an Instructional Element in ODL – Must be supported

- ▶ One particular important instructional elements of contemporary open distance learning is interaction.
- ▶ It is a widely held that a high level of interaction is desirable (Dzakiria & Idrus, 2005) and positively affects the effectiveness of any open distance learning course.
- ▶ There is little attention to the cost/benefits of interaction in terms of preparation time versus instructional effects.



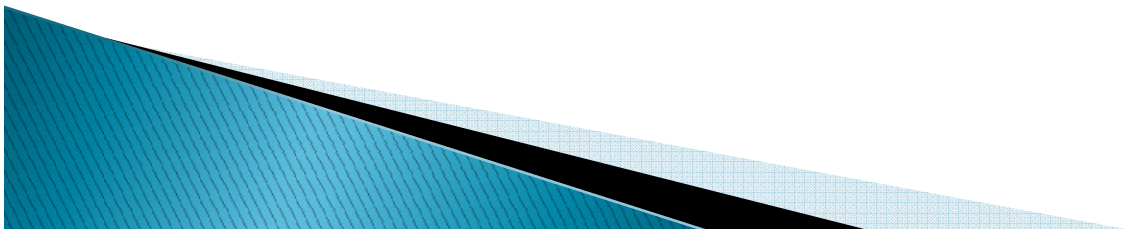
# Better Learning Support to Enhance ODL Learning Interaction

- ▶ The concept of Learning Support for ODL interaction is more complicated than it has been treated in traditional instructional theory or classroom teaching.
- ▶ Interaction in distance learning needs to be differentiated according to content vs teacher vs student, immediate vs delayed, and types of learners, learning styles, etc.



# 7 Principles of Interaction

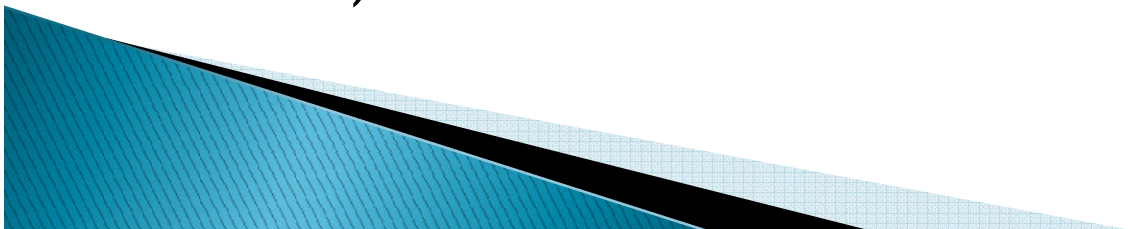
- ▶ The concept of interaction is a core element of the seven principles of good practice in education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). These practices include:
  - ▶ encouraging faculty/students contact;
  - ▶ developing reciprocity and cooperation;
  - ▶ engaging in active learning;
  - ▶ providing quick feedback;
  - ▶ emphasizing the amount of time dedicated to a task (SLT)
  - ▶ communicating high expectations; and
  - ▶ respecting diversity.





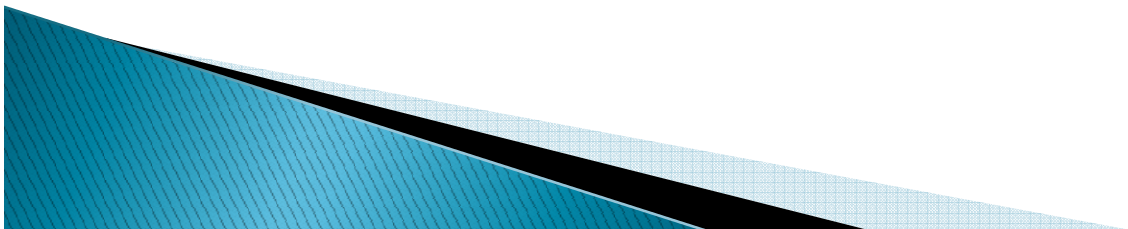
# We ALSO know the Barriers to ODL

- ▶ Problems and barriers encountered by the student fall into several distinct categories; costs and motivators, feedback and teacher contact, student support and services, alienation and isolation, lack of experience, and training.
- ▶ More so than traditional students, distance learners are more likely to have insecurities about learning (Knapper, 1988).
- ▶ These insecurities are founded in personal and school related issues such as financial costs of study, disruption of family life, perceived irrelevance of their studies and lack of support from employers. These pressures often result in higher dropout rates than among traditional students (Sweet, 1986, Dzakiria, 2004).

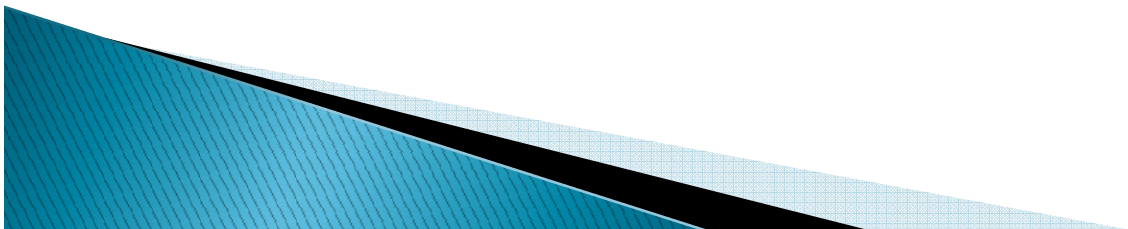


# More Issues in ODL

- ▶ Feelings of alienation and isolation reported by distance students. Students of all kinds want to be part of a larger community, and simply a member of an ODL course. For many traditional students, this is an important part of their social lives (Dzakiria (2004)).



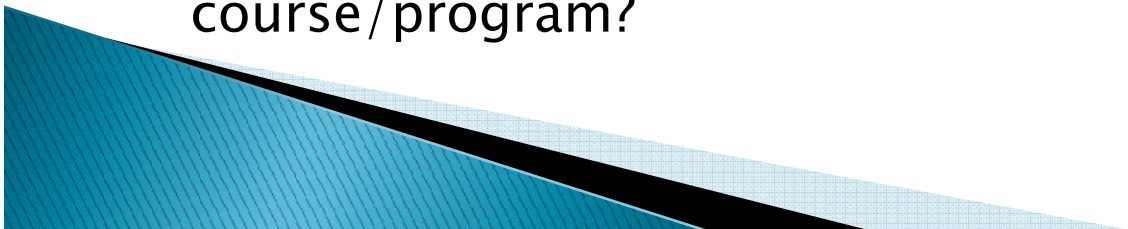
- ▶ The "distance" aspect of distance learning takes away much of the social interactions that would be present in traditional learning environments. This problem must be mitigated by institutions providing a sense of personal involvement between the student the institution–the community.



# Pertinent Research Questions

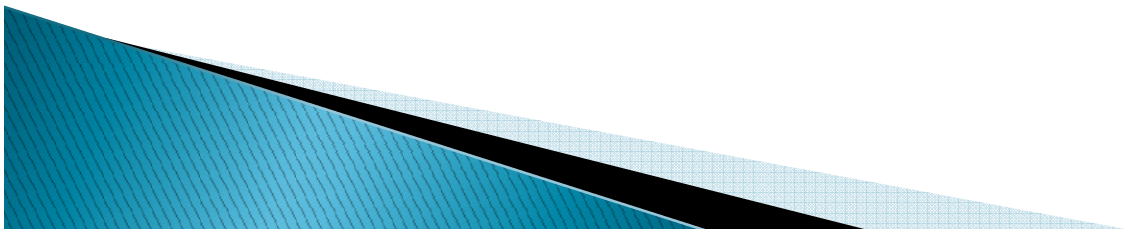
Existing studies do not really address fundamental issues relating to learning support and interactivity. This includes:

- ▶ (1) Is frequency of interaction in a course a meaningful measure?
- ▶ (2) Is interaction more important for certain groups of learners than others?
- ▶ (3) Is interaction more critical in certain kinds of learning than others?
- ▶ (4) Does interaction affect learning outcomes such as retention or transfer?
- ▶ (5) Does interaction increase student comprehension/ understanding?
- ▶ (6) Does interactivity always improve learner satisfaction?
- ▶ (7) What form of interaction is the most critical?
- ▶ (8) Does/should the pattern of interaction change over a course/program?



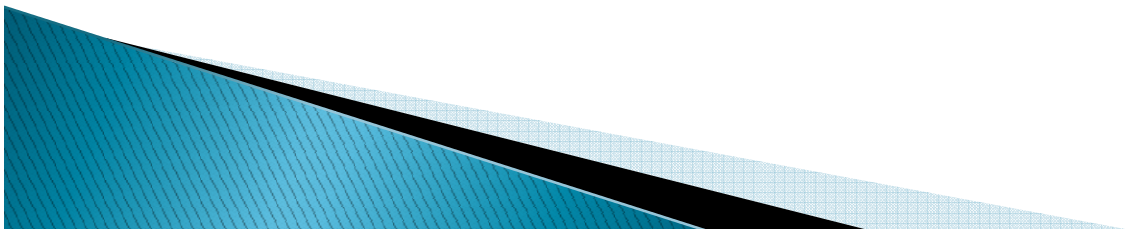
# Conditions for Success in ODL– Better Learning Support

- ▶ Understanding the expectations
- ▶ Proper environment
  - Students scheduled into a regular class period
  - Supported by a trained mentor/tutor during that period within the instructional day
- ▶ Regular access to working technology
- ▶ Students not afraid to try new things, but have tools to assist them to learn
- ▶ Local learning centre team support



# Community of Support

- ▶ Support is necessary in all areas that affect the students.
- ▶ These are made up of small communities—stakeholders within the community.
- ▶ One can view it in a diagram of concentric circles where the student is the centre—nucleus

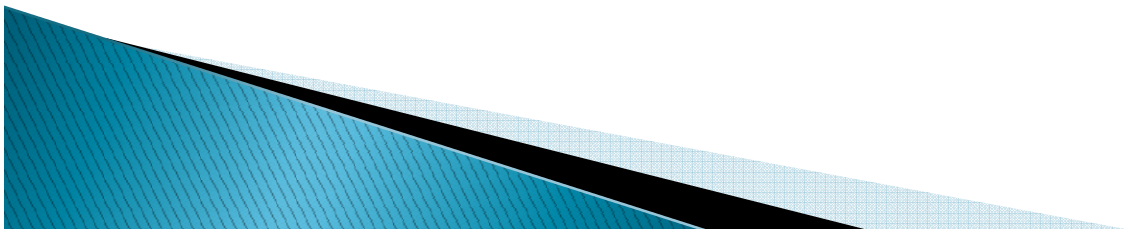




# Strategies for Success

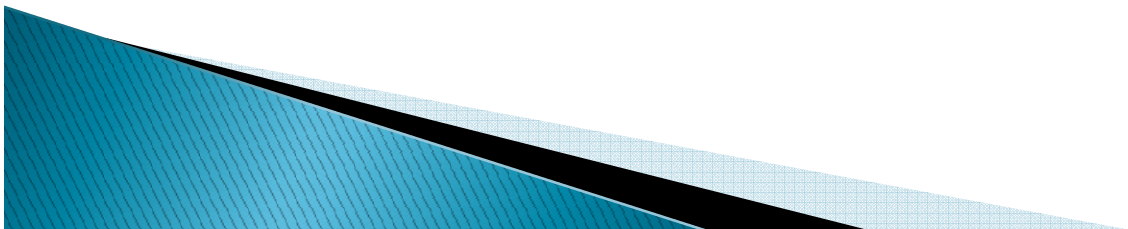
In order to succeed, those communities affecting students (educational counselors, tutors/mentors, administrators, peers—other learners, etc) must be addressed.

- ▶ Classes offered f–2–f and online
  - Mentor Training
  - Online Teacher Facilitation
  - Online Tools for Teachers
  - Online Tools for Administrators
  - \*We need to continuously reflect what we have and how we do things



# Strategies for Success

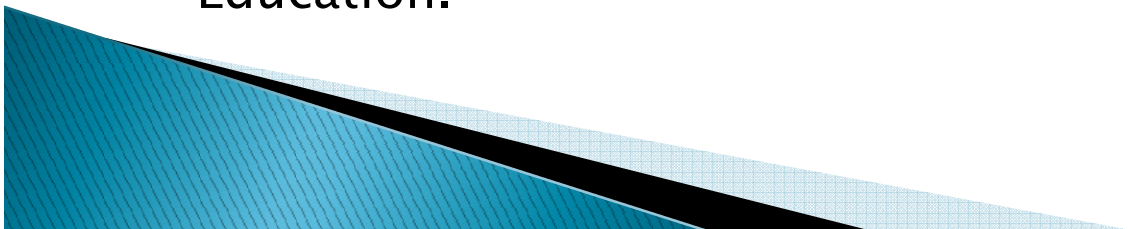
- ▶ All the students MUST have the same 24 hour access to online tools giving the students opportunities for collaboration, communication, and sharing with their instructors, their peers, and experts, as well as access to posted resources and web links. Recognizing that ODL learners are social beings that long to communicate, this should prove to be a catalyst for renewed interest in learning and subject matter understanding.
- ▶ Nevertheless– ODL students are NEVER Homogeneous, they are quite often Hetrogeneous
- ▶ Data must be gathered and analyzed to provide avenue for success for each student.



# Multiple Measures of Data–is Needed to PROFILE ODL Learners

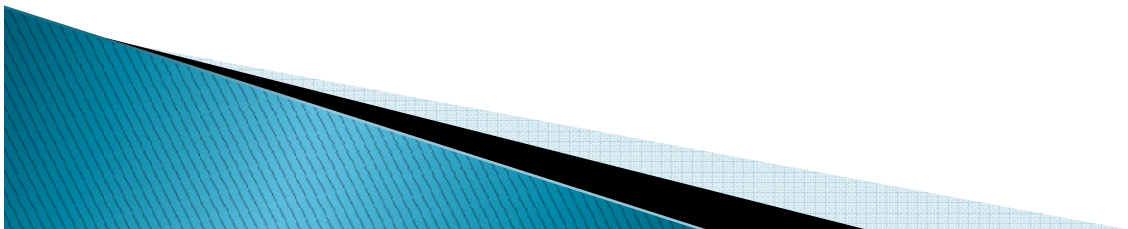
- ▶ Demographics
- ▶ Perceptions
- ▶ Student learning
- ▶ Educational Info, and future planning
- ▶ **All four areas must be considered for student success.**

Adapted from: Bernhardt, V. L. (1998). Data analysis for comprehensive schoolwide improvement. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.



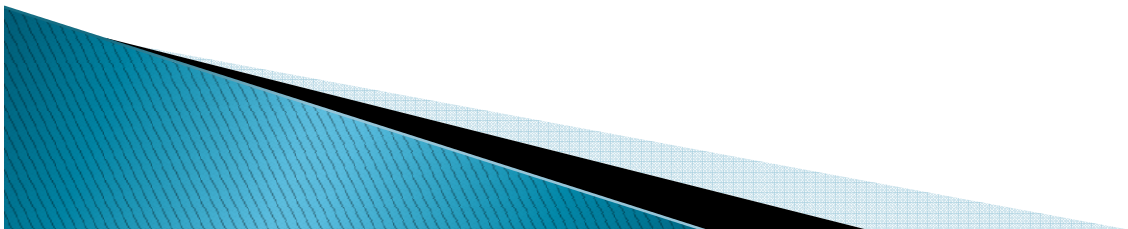
# We have to look at – Demographic

- ▶ Enrollment, attendance, drop-out rate, ethnicity, gender, grade-level



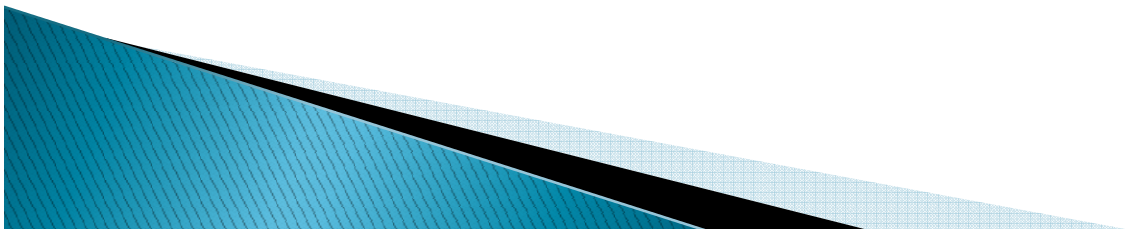
# We have to Value – Perceptions Data

- ▶ Perceptions of learning environment, values and beliefs, attitudes, observations



# We have to assess the – Students Learning Data

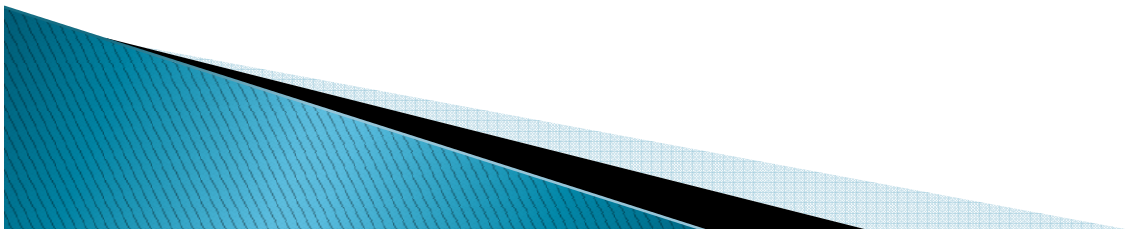
- ▶ Standardized tests, norm/criterion-referenced tests, teacher observations of abilities, authentic assessments





# We need to tap on the Learners' – Educational Background and Ambition

- ▶ Descriptions of past educational experiences, life objectives, educational status, processes and programs to enroll/enrolled



# Creating Learning Communities

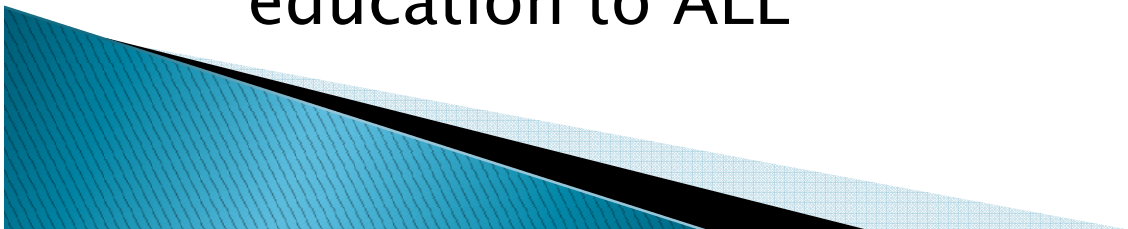
## Provide the followings:

- ▶ Gains in student achievement; high graduation rates; lower drop-out rates
- ▶ Quality solutions to problems
- ▶ Increased confidence
- ▶ Better learning Support for learners
- ▶ Better teaching support for tutors, teachers, mentors,
- ▶ Collaboration and sharing among all stakeholders
  - New ideas, methods and materials
  - Expanded pool of ideas, materials and methods
  - Additional avenues for sharing, presenting and publishing
- ▶ Access to data



# In Summation: Learning Support is a Community System

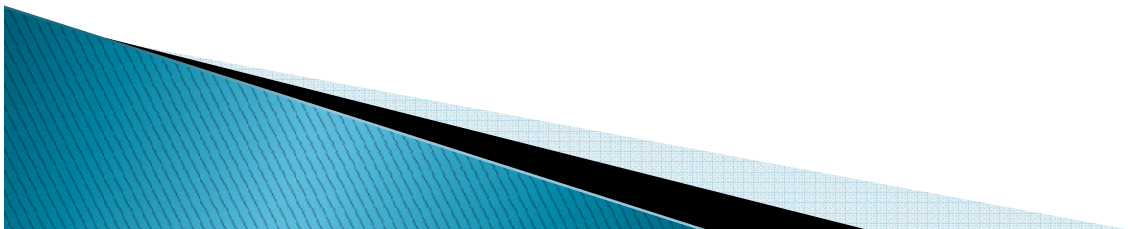
1. ODL with an emphasis on community building is the way forward .
2. With best practices in place, ODL provides an avenue to address learners' Profile, learning styles and multiple intelligences of today's digital learners.
3. These communities provide increased understanding and hone skills needed to interact effectively in the teaching & learning process.
4. Subsequently, this community is the essence of Life Long Learning and support Malaysia Government initiative to Democratised higher education to ALL



# CONCLUSION

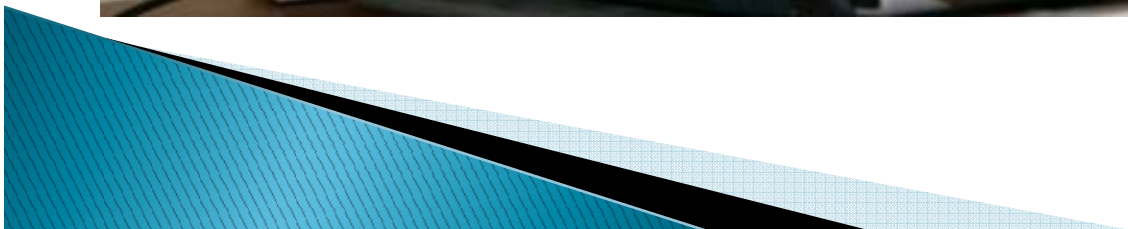
## Learning Support in ODL

- ▶ An important element in ODL, and must be addressed continuously
- ▶ Could be a good measure of ODL success stories
- ▶ We need to improve support & services
- ▶ It is a responsibility of primary stakeholders in ODL–Institution, the teachers and the technology use



# Tomorrow?

Alexander, photo by his mother, Jennifer Madigan Roth



# Thank you

- ▶ Lets share your thoughts, comments and questions

